

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7871
INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY MANILA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS
USLO PEKING
AMEMBASSY RANGOON
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

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MANILA - PLEASE PASS TO ASSISTANT SECRETARY HOLBROOKE

SINGAPORE - PLEASE PASS TO DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OAKLEY

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
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SUMMARY: DESPITE GENERAL BELIEF AMONG THAIS THAT CAMBODIANS
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PROVOKED HANOI, THE CAMBODIAN-VIETNAMESE BORDER CONFLICT HAS
RE-AROUSSED CONCERN IN BANGKOK ABOUT HANOI'S INTENTIONS IN
THE AREA. THERE IS CONCERN THAT THE BORDER FIGHTING MAY
HAVE WHETTED VIETNAMESE AMBITIONS. MFA IS NOT
OPTIMISTIC ABOUT EARLY RESOLUTION OF THE CONFLICT, NOR DO
WORKING LEVEL OFFICIALS BELIEVE DIFFICULTIES WITH THE
VIETNAMESE WILL LEAD PHNOM PENH TO NEGOTIATE A SETTLEMENT

OF BORDER PROBLEMS WITH BANGKOK. THE THAI BORDER HAS BEEN RELATIVELY QUIETER SINCE LATE DECEMBER THAN IT HAD BEEN IN MID-1977. DESPITE THAI QUESTIONS ABOUT HANOI'S PURPOSES AND NOTWITHSTANDING THE IMPLICATIONS OF A CONCEIVABLE CHANGE OF REGIME IN PHNOM PENH, THE PRINCIPAL IMMEDIATE BENEFICIARY OF THE CONFLICT, AT LEAST IN THE SHORT RUN, MAY BE THAILAND. END SUMMARY.

1. CONFLICT BETWEEN CAMBODIA AND VIET-NAM HAS RAISED AGAIN FOR THAIS THE QUESTION OF HANOI'S AMBITIONS IN THE AREA. THE FIGHTING HAS ALSO MARRED WHAT THAIS HAD SEEN AS A TREND TOWARD SMOOTHER RELATIONS IN SE ASIA GENERALLY. PUBLICLY, THE RTG, LED BY PM KRIANGSAK, HAS ATTEMPTED TO MAINTAIN AN AIR OF DETACHMENT FROM THE STRUGGLE AND HAS VOICED THE HOPE THAT THE CONFLICT WILL BE SETTLED AMICABLY AND QUICKLY. HOWEVER, UNDERNEATH THIS CALM SURFACE CONCERN IS GROWING OVER THE MEANING OF THIS UNEXPECTED DEVELOPMENT.

2. MFA SOURCES WITH WHOM WE MAINTAIN RUNNING DIALOGUE ON INDOCHINA HAVE FREQUENTLY IN THE PAST EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER LONG-TERM INTENTIONS OF HANOI IN THE REGION. THEY HAVE REGULARLY INDICATED THEIR ASSESSMENT THAT HANOI WISHED ULTIMATELY TO EXERCISE HEGEMONY IN INDOCHINA AND ULTIMATELY GREATLY INCREASE ITS INFLUENCE OVER THAILAND AND THE REST OF SE ASIA. THAI POLICY SINCE 1973 HAS SOUGHT TO ENGAGE VIET-NAM IN MEANINGFUL DISCOURSE TO NORMALIZE RELATIONS.
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THIS PROCESS WOULD, IT WAS HOPED, HELP CURB HANOI'S EXTERNAL AMBITIONS OR AT LEAST CHANNEL THEM INTO MORE CONSTRUCTIVE DIRECTIONS. WITH NORMALIZATION BETWEEN HANOI AND BANGKOK NOW PROCEEDING SATISFACTORILY, HIGHLIGHTED BY THE CURRENT VISIT TO BANGKOK BY SRV FONMIN NGUYEN DUY TRINH, MFA CONTACTS SEE JUSTIFICATION FOR THAI POLICY TOWARD VIET-NAM AND INDOCHINA GENERALLY. SHARING BORDER PROBLEMS OVER CAMBODIA WITH VIET-NAM, AWARE OF THE PROVOCATIVE AND AT TIMES ATROCIOUS ATTACKS ON THAI BORDER VILLAGES BY THE CAMBODIANS, THAIS BELIEVE THAT THE CAMBODIANS WORE VIET-NAMESE PATIENCE THIN AND PROVOKED VIETNAMESE RETALIATION. ALTHOUGH CAMBODIANS MAY HAVE INVITED THE INVASION OF THE PARROT'S BEAK, MANY THAIS FEAR THAT VIET-NAM MAY USE THE OCCASION TO EXTEND ITS INFLUENCE INTO CAMBODIA. IN EFFECT, IN THAI EYES, CAMBODIAN BEHAVIOR MAY HAVE WHETTED VIET-NAMESE APPETITES AGAIN TO SEEK TO ESTABLISH A "UNION OF INDOCHINA" UNDER THEIR CONTROL.

3. MFA SOURCES ARE NOT SANGUINE ABOUT AN EARLY SETTLEMENT OF THE DISPUTE, AND ARE WARY OF PREDICTING THE COURSE OF THE POSSIBLE FIGHTING ITSELF. THAIS RECOGNIZE THE CLEAR SUPERIORITY OF VIETNAMESE FORCES, HOWEVER, BUT MFA CON-

TACTS DO NOT FORESEE A VIETNAMESE TAKEOVER OF CAMBODIA.
MFA ALSO SEEMS DUBIOUS THAT EARLY NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE
VIETNAMESE AND CAMBODIANS ARE LIKELY TO OCCUR.

4. WHILE SENIOR MILITARY OFFICIALS HAVE TOLD THE PRESS
ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS THAT THE THAI-CAMBODIAN BORDER HAS
BEEN RELATIVELY QUIET SINCE DEC 24, SMALL-SCALE INCIDENTS
CONTINUE. DESPITE PRESUMED CAMBODIAN PREOCCUPATION WITH
THE VIET BORDER SITUATION, MFA NOTES THAT SMALL GUERRILLA
STYLE ATTACKS COULD CONTINUE TO KEEP THE THAI BORDER BUBBLING.
MFA OFFICER ALSO HAS EXPRESSED DOUBT THAT THE SITUATION
ON THE VIETNAMESE SIDE WOULD LEAD PHNOM PENH TO BE MORE
FORTHCOMING IN NEGOTIATIONS WITH THAILAND. HE HAS NOTED
THAT WHEN FORMER FONMIN PHICHAI RATTAKUN IN 1976 ATTEMPTED
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TO PERSUADE THE CAMBODIANS TO EXPAND THE RANGE OF ACTIVITY
ALLOWED THE POIPET BORDER LIAISON OFFICE, THE CAMBODIANS
DECLINED, IMPLYING THAT PERMITTING GREATER SCOPE FOR THE
POIPET LIAISON OFFICE WOULD INDUCE THE VIETNAMESE TO ASK
FOR REPRESENTATION OUTSIDE PHNOM PENH IN CAMBODIA. TRYING
TO CURB VIETNAMESE INFLUENCE, CAMBODIANS WANTED NO SUCH
PRESENCE FOR THE VIETNAMESE, ACCORDING TO MFA INTERPRETATION.
BECAUSE OF THESE FACTORS, OFFICIAL HAS EXPRESSED PESSIMISM
THAT THE VIET-CAMBODIA DIFFICULTIES WOULD LEAD TO AN
EARLY RESOLUTION OF BANGKOK'S TROUBLES WITH CAMBODIA.

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ACTION EA-12

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MOREOVER, OFFICIAL HAS CONCLUDED, WITHOUT EXPLANATION, CAMBODIA COULD PUT BANGKOK IN A VERY EMBARRASSING POSITION. (NOTE: WE ASSUME OFFICIAL MEANT THAT PHNOM PENH COULD PREDICATE IMPROVED RELATIONS WITH THAILAND ON AT LEAST SOME THAI SUPPORT FOR CAMBODIA IN ITS CLASH WITH VIET-NAM.)

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5. THAIS ARE ASSESSING THE VIET-CAMBODIAN CONFLICT AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF GENERALLY IMPROVING RELATIONS IN THE REGION. SEPTEMBER VISIT BY POL POT TO PEKING (AND PYONGYANG), ANNOUNCEMENT OF COMMUNIST PARTY RULE IN CAMBODIA, SEVERAL HIGH-LEVEL VISITS TO CAMBODIA (BURMA'S NE WIN, MALAYSIA'S FONMIN RITTAUDDEEN, CHINA'S CHEN YUNG-KUEI, AND EVEN LAOS' PREMIER SOUPHANAVONG), APPEARED TO INDICATE THAT DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA WAS AT LAST BEGINNING TO OPEN ITSELF TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD AND, ONE COULD HOPE, TO THE MODERATING INFLUENCE DERIVED THEREFROM. SRV FONMIN NGUYEN DUY TRIANH'S CURRENT TOUR OF MOST ASEAN STATES ALSO FELL INTO THE PATTERN OF SMOOTHER RELATIONS AMONG THE SE ASIANS. ECONOMIC REQUIREMENTS IN VIET-NAM FOR THE MOMENT AT LEAST SEEMED MORE PRESSING THAN IDEOLOGICAL OR TERRITORIAL CONSIDERATIONS.

6. ADDING TO REGIONAL AURA OF GOOD FEELING, THAIS BELIEVE ARE THE SERIOUS EFFORTS OF THE NEW THAI GOVERNMENT TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH ITS NEIGHBORS. IMPENDING ESTABLISHMENT OF EMBASSIES IN BANGKOK AND HANOI HAS ADDED TO AIR OF NORMALCY IN REGION AND REPRESENTS A MAJOR ADVANCE IN NORMALIZING THAILAND'S FOREIGN RELATIONS.

7. COMMENT: DESPITE THAI CONCERN ABOUT HANOI'S LONG-TERM INTENTIONS (AND NOTWITHSTANDING THE IMPLICATIONS OF A CONCEIVABLE, PRO-VIETNAMESE REGIME IN PHNOM PENH) PERHAPS THE PRINCIPAL BENEFICIARY, IN THE SHORT TERM AT LEAST, TO THE CAMBODIAN-VIETNAMESE CONFLICT IS THAILAND. THE SERIOUS THREAT TO CAMBODIAN SECURITY WHICH VIET-NAM NOW EXPLICITLY POSES MAY CURB CAMBODIAN ATTACKS AGAINST THE THAI BORDER AREA IN SPITE OF CURRENT INDICATIONS TO THE CONTRARY. BY THE SAME TOKEN, VIETNAMESE CONCERN OVER ITS RELATIONS WITH CAMBODIA AND THE WIDER IMPLICATIONS OF
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RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AMONG THE COMMUNIST STATES MAY TEND TO LIMIT VIETNAMESE INITIATIVES IN SUPPORT OF THE STILL SLOWLY-GROWING THAI COMMUNIST INSURGENCY. THAILAND PROBABLY HAS AN ADDITIONAL PERIOD OF TIME TO SET ITS DOMESTIC HOUSE IN ORDER, AND THE HEAVY EMPHASIS ON DOMESTIC REFORM AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE STATEMENT BY PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK ON HIS GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAM (ON JAN 1, 1978), INDICATES A DETERMINATION TO MAKE GOOD USE OF THE PRESENT OPPORTUNITIES.
WHITEHOUSE

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